

Just Friends by pumpon.panda

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Summary: Bev Hanscom's a great friend who only wants to help her friend, Eddie Kaspbrak, after a bad break up. After taking Eddie to the skating rink to help him relax, a mutual interest between the owner of the rink, Richie Tozier, and Eddie develops. However, they're both too oblivious to realize the pining. Between misunderstandings and drama, will the two actually realize the potential

1. Chapter 1

Chapter 1

"Come on, Eddie. It'll be fun!" Bev said as she threw a pair of skates Eddie's way. He watched as they landed in front of him on the ground.

"No way in hell," Eddie replied, using the toe of his foot to push the ice skates away.

"I could fall and break something. Let alone, you don't know how many people have shoved their gross ass feet into those shoes. They don't even clean them! I could get athlete's foot or a merca!" Bev stared at Eddie as he went on his fifth tirade since leaving the apartment. She rolled her eyes and continued to tie the laces on her skates.

"You're already here, might as well have some fun! Plus, the guy who owns this place is letting us have free reign of the rink. Seriously, this is supposed to help get your mind off of things."

"Well it was until now, Bev," Eddie grumbled. Bev reached out and grabbed the ice skates and sat them in Eddies lap. Eddie's face wrinkled in disgust.

"You're trying to kill me, aren't you? You could've cut my hand on those blades. God, I can smell the foot cheese from here. There's no way I'm putting these things on." Bev gave an exasperated signed and shrugged her shoulders.

"Suit yourself." Bev sat down on the bench next to Eddie and slipped her feet into the ice skates she rented for herself. She smirked at Eddie's disgusted face as she laced her skates. He stared at the scuffs around the edge of the shoe and the dull blade. If the outside was in such poor shape, then he could only imagine how the inside of the skates were.

"You're going to get a toe fungus and lose your feet if you continue to wear those," Eddie grumbled one more time. Bev didn't reply to his

rant as she stood up and waddled through the doors to head towards the rink. Eddie walked behind her with his arms stretched open to prevent Bev from falling on the ground. He was worried she was going to stumble at any moment but she managed to make it to the rink without an incident.

"Alright, let's get this started!" Bev shouted, pushing herself onto the ice, squealing like a child as she slid.

"You're going to break something!" Eddie attempted one more time before he spread out his jacket on the bleachers. He questioned if he was going to actually sit or if it were more sanitary to stand. All the germs that must be on the bleachers from unwashed shit covered shoes. He didn't have much time to think more before he was shoved to the side as a guy in all black bounded for the ice. Judging by how fast the guy was moving, he was definitely hoping to skate with Bev. Eddie recalled how Bev told him that the owner of the ice rink gave them a free reign of the place. He put two and two together to realize that he must be the owner. Eddie eyed the back of the man for a few seconds before scoffing at the audacity the guy had to go after Bev.

It wasn't long until the guy reached Beverly on the ice and grabbed her hand as if they were a couple that hadn't seen each other in a while. Eddie knew Bev could stand up for herself but sometimes she let too much slide because she didn't want to cause a scene. Eddie figured because the guy was the owner of the rink, Beverly was letting the flirtation go. However, when the guy wrapped his arm around Beverly's waist, Eddie couldn't hold back the brotherly protection he felt for her.

"She's married!" Eddie couldn't help but shout, standing up on the bleachers as he did. The guy either didn't hear him or ignored him because he continued to hold onto Beverly. Eventually he let go in favor of holding her hand again. Eddie noticed the two slowly moving towards him across the ice. Great, what could this guy possibly want? Putting his germ infested hands on Beverly, knowing she's married. How could Beverly be okay with that as well!

"Hey, Eddie! This is Richie. He's the owner of this place." Bev smiled and leaned on the railing. The guy that shoved Eddie smiled brightly at Eddie.

"You didn't tell me your husband was shorter than the Smurfs," Richie laughed at his own joke. Eddie stared back unamused.

"I'm not her husband," Eddie rolled his eyes.

"Yeah, sorry Richie. Wrong guy. This is Eddie, he's one of my best friends. Anyways, thanks again for letting us use the rink for today." Richie smiled and winked at Bev.

"Anything for you." Bev laughed and shoved Richie in the shoulder. "You're ridiculous. You're going to give Eddie a coronary if you keep this up." Bev leaned forward and poked the vein straining on Eddie's forehead.

"I told him I brought you along and he decided he needed to tease you. Plus, he was helping me practice a routine that I've been trying to learn."

"You need to scrub your hands," Eddie responded, pulling out hand sanitizer to rub the spot on his forehead that Bev just touched. He held the hand sanitizer for Bev, waiting for her to extend her hand.

"Short and a germaphobe. What a... interesting person." The way Richie breathed out the phrase, Eddie could tell it wasn't meant as a compliment. Eddie narrowed his eyes at the curly-haired guy, hoping that his normally worried face conveyed this distrust in the man.

"Well, fuck you," Eddie quipped. In response, Richie merely laughed and winked at him then pushed off the railing to slide around on the ice again.

"Real awesome of a friend you have there," Eddie puffed. "Anymore of a jackass and I'd question what farm he wandered off of." Bev responded by laughing and heading back to the ice to skate with Richie.

"You didn't tell me your friend had such a huge stick up his ass," Richie laughed, circling Bev again. Bev punched his arm and Richie grabbed her hand as she did.

"Relax, he just got out of a bad relationship. His boyfriend was a huge dick and abusive." The look on Beverly's face told Richie not ask

anymore.

"Boyfriend?" Richie asked after a little bit of silence between the two of them.

"Yeah. Why?"

"The way he acted with you, I would have assumed he was in love with you," Richie laughed, though the look in his eyes told a different story.

"Really. That's it? No other reason?"

"Would I, Richie Tozier, have any alternative reason to ask about such sensitive information." He waggled his eyebrows. Beverly raised an eyebrow in return but let the conversation die. They skated around for a little bit more, shoving each other and goofing around until the sound of a yelp reached their ears. Beverly looked over and saw Eddie struggling to get onto the ice, holding onto the railing for dear life. Beverly quickly skated over to Eddie while Richie stayed back, watching from a distance.

"Aw, you're just like a baby deer learning to walk," Beverly chuckled. She reached out her hands to help Eddie but he quickly swatted them away.

"I don't like how that ass is circling you like a vulture. He weirds me out," Eddie panted. He continued to clinging to the railing and with his legs wobbling underneath him.

"That's just how Richie is. He's a touchy-feely person. Ben doesn't care and more importantly I don't care either. He's my friend, just like you." The tone in Bev's voice told Eddie to drop the issue. Eddie sighed but he got it. Eddie was going to apologize but Bev skated off again in a huff, preparing to go another lap around the ice. While Eddie continued clinging to the railing, he heard skates come up behind him.

"Seriously, Bev. I don't need help."

"Well that's a good thing, because I'm not Bev and I don't give a shit about what you say." Eddie turned around wided eyed to see Richie

standing behind him, his curly hair slightly stuck to his forehead from the sweat of skating around the rink. Eddie felt a slight familiar pang but ignored it in favor of continuing to cling to the railing. As far as Eddie was concerned he wasn't going to let go. He was silently cursing himself in his head for even stepping onto the ice. For even putting on the disgusting ice skates that would undoubtedly result in him amputating his foot. Before Eddie could develop anymore thoughts about the amount of germs that were festering in the shoes he was wearing, he felt a pair of arms encircle his waist and pull him away from the edge of the railing.

"What the fuck are you doing?" Eddie practically screamed, flailing his arms in front of him in a desperate attempt to pull himself back to some semblance of safety.

"Isn't obvious? I'm getting your pussy ass on to the ice. I am not going to let this rink be wasted, no matter how much of an awesome person Bev is," Richie explained, still pulling Eddie by the waist onto the ice. As Eddie reached out his hands to grab the railing one more time, Richie took advantage of the moment and grabbed Eddie's hand in his. He spun Eddie around, so that Eddie's back was now facing the safety he had regretted leaving and was now facing Richie. Richie slowly moved backwards in a side-to-side motion, dragging Eddie with him by their hands. Richie reached up his hand to grab Eddie's other hand before Eddie could truly comprehend the situation that was unfolding before him.

"Your hands are gross and sweaty," Eddie managed to get out, staring directly and the exposed skin of their hands that touched. The look on his face displayed his discomfort and disgust, which only caused Richie to laugh instead of feeling insulted.

"What the hell is your obsession with germs?"

"Do you not know how dirty the human body is? Especially after all the sweat you've produced? It's horrendous. You probably have enough bacteria building up under your outfit that you're probably developing a skin infection as we speak." The look in Richie's displayed his amusement in the neurotic obsession of the short brunette in front of him. To Richie's delight, Eddie's focus on the germs stopped him from focusing on the potential damage from

falling on the ice. As a result, Eddie was actually ice skating.

"Oh! You're so right. I must have so many germs on my sweaty palms. Wouldn't want poor Eds to get some type of disease."

"Don't call me -" Eddie started but stopped when Richie let go of his hands. At first Eddie was relieved that he was finally free of the uncomfortable grasp that Richie had on his hands. Then he realized that he longer had any form of stability for skating. The panic set in immediately and Eddie started flailing his arms. By the time that Eddie had realized what he set himself up for Beverly had made her way to the two men. She joined Richie in laughing at Eddie's expense. In one swift motion, Eddie flailed his arms and fell back onto his ass. This caused Richie and Bev to laugh even harder, doubling over. While part of Eddie couldn't believe his friend just stood there laughing at him, the other half was reminded of when they were children and Bev would do the same thing no matter what. The pain of colliding with the ice and the freezing cold started spreading across Eddie's ass. He knew there was going to be a bruise there tomorrow morning if it wasn't already forming.

"How about instead of laughing you fuckers help me up," Eddie snapped, glaring at the two of them. Despite the way it sounded there was no real malice behind Eddie's words. He just wanted off the ice and back in the safety of - No. His apartment wasn't safe, was it. Eddie was lost in thought when he felt two pairs of arms pull him off the ice and steady him on his skates. Eddie hadn't realized he zoned out until Bev patted him on his back. He looked up at her. A knowing look was in her eyes that told him Bev knew exactly what he was thinking about. Richie could feel the tense atmosphere and had stopped laughing the minute that he and Bev picked Eddie up. He looked from Eddie and then to Beverly. Staying quiet was his best option at this point since he didn't really grasp the situation. He also didn't know Eddie well enough to joke with him and lighten the mood. Richie laughed internally knowing that if he were ten years younger he would have made a joke no matter what. Trashmouth Tozier didn't know the meaning of being quiet in a serious moment. Rather, Richie thought, he didn't know how to deal with a serious moment without cracking some jokes to ease the tension.

"I think we're going to head out," Bev explained, talking to Richie but

looking at Eddie. Eddie nodded in agreement, though Richie realized it was more that Beverly was asking Eddie if that's what he wanted to do.

"No, yeah... I get it." Richie simply agreed, feeling uncomfortable at the sudden change. "If you ever want to, you know... come back and skate again. Just, uh... let me know, okay?" Richie stuttered out. He scratched his head, feeling the sweat roll down his scalp. When did he start sweating? Dammit this was too awkward. He didn't even know this guy and here he was feeling more than he wanted to.

"Thanks Richie. I'll let you know." Beverly barely even glanced back as she wrapped her arm around Eddie's shoulders. With her back to him, Beverly gingerly waved and walked through the double doors and back into the lobby so they could take off their skates. Richie simply watched them leaving, feeling a little left out but still understanding the situation wasn't something he could truly relate to. He hadn't held a serious relationship that he could recall, except for maybe a month. He laughed out loud at that. A month was not a serious relationship. For whatever reason, Richie could feel himself drawn to that scrawny hypochondriac. He scoffed at the ridiculousness of even considering pursuing a relationship with that trainwreck. But still... part of him felt a sudden need to protect the anxious, nervous, germaphobe mess that seemed to hate him. But dammit if he wasn't cute as fuck. As the double doors slowed to a close, Richie decided that he would cash in on the favor that Bev owed him.

2. Chapter 2

Chapter 2

Richie stared at the entrance to the fair. He couldn't believe he was doing this. He shivered a little and pulled his jacket tighter against he neck. He pretended the shiver was a response to the crisp fall air rather than his nerves. With his ticket in hand, he took a deep breath and stepped up to the turnstile. Some teenage that clearly was regretting their decision to pick up the part time job scanned his ticket and the turnstile allowed him through. Richie sucked in a deep breath and pulled out his phone. He only had one unread message and that was from Beverly. *We're over by the ferris wheel.* Richie took in a deep breath and mentally prepared himself for whatever it was he was going to get himself into. All Bev had relayed to him was that she and Ben were going to be having a double date. Richie wasn't entirely sure who it was that he was supposed to be "dating," which left him as a nervous mess, not that he would admit it.

He exited the turnstile and pulled out his phone to call Bev. Before he had the opportunity to even dial her number, a man walked up to Richie and placed a hand on his shoulder. Richie wasn't entirely sure who the man was but hoped that some stranger wouldn't just walk up to him.

"Hey," the man began, adjusting his denim jacket, "Bev was worried you wouldn't show. We've been waiting for about a half our. I almost ran out of Swip." Richie stared at the man for a few more seconds as he attempted to formulate in his head who exactly this man was. Looking him up and down, Richie could only determine that this man was decently attractive. Nothing he would write home about, but cute nonetheless. Based on the mention of Bev and the fact that this guy somehow knew what he looked like, Richie figured out that this was Ben.

"Oh, yeah. My GPS wasn't cooperating," Richie stammered out. *Dammit, Richie. You're a comedian, why the hell couldn't you come up with a better comeback.* Ben patted Richie in the back and led him towards Bev. There was another person standing behind her but because their back was to him, Richie couldn't figure out who it was.

However, the hairstyle struck him as familiar. Richie racked his brain trying to determine who it was that would be out here and who it was that Beverly would bring along.

"It's good, man. You're here now and that's all that matters. So, Beverly told me you've already met our friend!" Ben gestured to the man that was standing behind Bev, but turned around at the mention of him. Richie immediately remembered who the man was. The germaphobe. The cute germaphobe that he had pestered Beverly about for the past week. Part of Richie wondered if this was a serious double date in hopes of setting them up or if Bev simply wanted him to keep an eye on Eddie.

"Oh, yeah. Eddie, right?" Richie attempted to play it cool.

"I'm glad you remembered!" Beverly playfully smiled, picking up the hint.

"Yeah, so glad," Eddie piped up. He stared at Richie and the look on his face said he was less than enthused to be there.

"Well, now that you're here, let's go play some games!" Bev grabbed Eddie and Richie's hands and pulled them towards the carnival attractions. They passed Ben who was talking to the man at the ferris wheel ride. Richie noticed something pass from Ben's hand to the employee, who's name tag read "Will". Bev waved her hand at Ben, who walked over from the attendant and they all filed into a line that slowly pushed through the games. Bev and Ben began talking back and forth while Richie and Eddie walked behind them. Occasionally, Richie and Eddie bumped shoulders or knocked hands. Richie assumed now would be a good time for small talk if there were going to spend the entire night together. However, he didn't know where to start. If he were younger, he would've made some offhand comment about his dick but something told him that with Eddie it wouldn't be a good icebreaker.

"So, how's the ass?" *Dammit Richie, that has to be your opening line?*

"Excuse me?" Eddie's eyes widened.

"You know. The one you fell flat on the ice with? Any bruises?" As if

remembering, Eddie reached back and rubbed his butt through his pants. Richie couldn't help following the motion with his eyes.

"It's fine. Thanks." The two continued walking in silence. *Well, this is going great.*

"Oh hey! Why don't we play this game?" Beverly grabbed Ben's hand and pulled them to the balloon race. Ben gave the attendant some money and he and Bev took a seat at the game. Richie also paid the attendant and took a seat at the game.

"Aren't you going to -" Richie started to ask Eddie but the look on his face told him all that he needed to know. Eddie had a look of disgust. If he were looking through Eddie's eyes, Richie would see all the invisible bugs crawling on the machine. Richie was prepared to say something more but was interrupted by the literal bottle of hand sanitizer that Eddie pulled out of seemingly nowhere. Richie watched as Eddie twisted off the cap and poured a hefty glob of sanitizer onto the controls and seat. They both watched it slowly run down the seat and machine only to be mopped up by a cloth Eddie also seemed to pull out of nowhere.

"These things are breeding grounds for the flu and pink eye. All these kids that don't wash their hands. It's a wonder they haven't been shut down for good." Eddie punctuated his rant with a loud "duh" sound. Richie watched as Edie lowered himself onto the seat but managed to hover ever so slightly above the seat. Richie took a sharp breath in at the gesture. Despite their short time together, Richie knew that for Eddie to even think about sitting at anything that could be "germ-infested" was the sweetest thing.

"Yeah, I've heard that too. Full of herpes, you know?" Richie attempted to mutter back. Eddie's eyes widened even more as if Richie presented a new idea that he hadn't thought of before.

"I'm, uh, joking." Eddie hosted himself off of the chair and Richie regretted saying anything.

Richie could tell that Eddie desperately wanted to play the game but his fear wouldn't let him. Eddie's eyes repeatedly shifted to the stuffed animal in the center. Richie felt himself prepare to roll his

eyes but stopped. Instead, Richie honed his focus onto the clown that stared back at him. *Don't even know why the fuck I'm doing this, but here we go.* The start bell rang and Richie aimed the hose at the clown's mouth. The balloon expanded and before Richie knew what had happened, the balloon popped. He released a breath he wasn't aware he was holding.

"Congrats. What do you want?" The kid at the booth gestured to the stuffed animals that were now available to him. He glanced over to Eddie and then followed his eyes to the ugly rat that for whatever reason Eddie kept staring at. *That ugly thing? Really Eddie? Dammit.*

"I'll take, uh, that one." Richie pointed to the ugly rat, scrunching up his face as he did.

"Really?" The kid raised an eyebrow. Richie took in a deep breath, already regretting his decision.

"Yup. That... thing."

"Okay." The kid reached up and pulled down the stuffed monstrosity from the hook that hoisted it above the other stuffed animals like the golden chalice of stuffed animals. A look passed between the game attendant and Eddie but Richie couldn't make it out. Richie grabbed the stuffed animal with a two of his fingers, suddenly understanding why Eddie was the germaphobe he was. The stuffed animal looked like it had been chewed up, ripped apart, ran through shit, and then pieced back together. Richie couldn't fathom why anyone would want some ugly, disgusting rat. But here he was, taking the stupid thing all for this guy who he was certain didn't see anything in him but an annoying douchebag.

Richie stood up and from the stool and continued barely grasping the stuffed rat. He turned towards Eddie and opened his mouth to offer the stuffed animal but was met with a small bottle of hand sanitizer in his face.

"Please, for the love of all that is good, clean your fucking hands." Eddie's eyes seemed to be permanently enlarged. Richie stared at the bottle of hand sanitizer that was slowly making him go cross eyed. Richie didn't know how long he stared at the bottle but he heard an

audible cough come from Eddie and saw him shake the bottle as if to get his attention. He raised an eyebrow felt himself sigh. He brought up his hand, much to Eddie's delight, and felt a glob of hand sanitizer fall onto his open palm. The sudden warm compared with the cool fall air caused Richie to shiver slightly but he quickly rubbed his hands together to appease the man still staring at him. Richie was glad that the smell of the fair covered he smell he knew would be emanating from the antibacterial product rubbed into his skin.

Richie looked up at Eddie and saw him sigh in relief and place the hand sanitizer back into - *Is that a fanny pack?* Richie couldn't believe what he was seeing and wondered how the hell did he miss seeing that before? It was an obvious bulge at Eddie's hip that caused his jacket to pucker outwards in an old man type of way.

"Uh, here," Richie said, getting Eddie's attention. Eddie looked up and Richie tossed him the stuffed rat.

"Here's your child." Richie laughed as he watched Eddie flail as he was clearly torn between catching the bacteria riddled monstrosity that he found oddly cute and letting the creature fall because of all the diseases it must hold, much like it's living inspiration. Eddie chose to catch the rat and his skin crawled in response. Richie couldn't help but laugh at the panic and disgust on Eddie's face, bringing a hand down on Eddie's back in an audible slap. Eddie jerked up and almost dropped the stuffed rat.

"Sorry Eds, looks like you have the plague now."

"Don't call me Eds," Eddie huffed, pulling out a small bottle of something from his fanny pack. Richie watched in mixed awe and embarrassment as he realized that it was a disinfectant. Why the fuck did this guy carry around a small bottle of disinfectant?

Eddie held the rat at arm's length and proceeded to spray the scruffy item up and down with the disinfectant. Eddie rotated the toy and then sprayed it a few more times for good measure. Richie watched as Eddie carefully placed the spray back into his fanny pack - gag - and let the stuffed animal air out from the heavy dose of spray.

"Why didn't you tell me you were an old man, Eds? I could've sworn

you were a young, handsome man," Richie poked at the fanny pack, much to Eddie's dismay. Eddie swatted his hand away and moved a little out of Richie's reach.

"Just because you'd fail a survival test doesn't mean everyone has to."

Richie simply laughed. Eddie pulled the stuffed rat closer to him now that it had dried from the air. Richie's laughing stopped. A soft look crossed Eddie's face as he hugged the rat and Richie couldn't help but feel a slight pang in his chest.

"I'm glad you've found your missing child ma'am. I can see where he gets his good looks," Richie quickly blurted out, his nerves getting the better of him. He was met with a glare from Eddie.

"You're the reason I had to disinfect him in the first place," Eddie replied with a huff. Richie laughed again.

"Alright mama rat, let's go meet up with Ben and Bev." Richie elbowed Eddie in his shoulder and pointed to the couple they came with to the fair. Ben and Beverly were heading towards the food stands. Richie grabbed Eddie's arm and pulled him along until they caught up with their friends.

"Hey, boys!" Bev greeted as Richie slung his arm around her.

"Hey Benverly, how's it going?"

"Why do you still insist on calling us that? We're two separate people, you know."

"Are you sure? With how you two are always attached at the hip I could've sworn you were conjoined twins."

"Oh haha Richie. It's a good thing you aren't a comedian with how bad your jokes are." Bev rolled her eyes, a smile on her face.

"Hey," Richie laughed, feigning hurt, "I'll have you know that my jokes are wonderful. I only got booed off the stage once last week." The two continued to laugh as Ben came back from the food stand with funnel cakes and drinks. He handed one of each to Bev and the other set to Richie.

"You two can share, right? 'Cause I only got enough Swip for us to share. It's crazy how much they charge. I should've bought my own case and just walked around with it. Eight dollars is an atrocity to the Swip name. It's meant to be enjoyed not empty your wallet." Richie raised an eyebrow and leaned close to Bev's ear.

"Is he always like this?" Bev didn't verbally respond but the look on her face told Richie all he needed to know. Richie laughed and dropped his arm from Bev's shoulders so he could walk next to Eddie.

"So, you good to share?"

"With you? Not at all. I've been smelling your breath all night. I don't want your halitosis to ruin my food. Plus, that stuff will kill you. You know they never clean the fryers of their oil? There's gunk from months ago at the bottom of those things. And don't even get me started on Swip. It's -"

"Don't even think about it Kaspbrak," Ben called back, looking over his shoulder at Eddie. "You keep your germaphobe rants away from my Swip." While Richie was sure that Ben was slightly joking, he could see the look in Ben's eyes that said he was also serious.

"Yeah, Kaspbrak!" Richie joined in. "Plus, I'm sure it's the smell of your own breath wafting back into you face that you've been smelling all night."

Eddie grumbled at the comment but didn't reply.

"So what's next on the agenda?" Richie asked, shoving funnel cake into his mouth.

"Well, it's almost nine and we have an early day at work tomorrow. I'd say we have time for one more ride. Any preferences?" Ben asked the group.

"Come on, Ben. You know I want to go on the Ferris Wheel." Beverly said, crossing her arms.

"Yeah, but our friends may not."

"Eh, I think we're good with it. Right, Eds?"

"Are you kidding? The -" Richie covered Eddie's mouth.

"Like I said, we're good." Eddie glared up at Richie. Richie simply smiled down at the smaller man and patted his shoulder with his other hand, powdered sugar from the funnel cakes leaving slight fingerprints behind.

"Are you sure?" Beverly asked, ignoring the exchange between Richie and Eddie and the comment that Eddie was getting ready to make.

"Yup! Let's go!" Richie prompted. Ben and Bev clasped hands and led the way to the Ferris Wheel.

"What was that about?!" Eddie yelled the minute that Richie dropped his hand. "Thank goodness that I had you put on hand sanitizer!"

"Shh!"

"What the hell. I don't have to -"

"I think Ben planned something for Bev," Richie quickly explained, glad there was distance between the couple and themselves.

"Oh. Well you could've told me."

"Well I wasn't entirely sure. I think Ben wanted to give the illusion that he didn't do anything, you know? Less suspicious." Eddie paused and thought about it for a moment. That certainly seemed like something that Ben would do, especially since Bev loved the ferris wheel.

"Yeah, I guess that makes sense."

"Well alright then, let's go!" Richie and Eddie followed Ben and Beverly to the line for the ferris wheel, which happened to be surprisingly short. They walked along the railing until they reached the que for the line.

"So why do you like ferris wheels so much, Beverly?" Richie asked while Eddie and Ben talked.

"Well, I like the height for one. Something about being able to see

everything below you gives you a sense of how small things really are." Beverly stared up at the top of the ferris wheel as she spoke. While Richie had known Beverly for a little over a year now, they hadn't spent time with one another. Sure, they talked when she came to the skating rink or the occasional comedy show that Richie managed to land, but nothing that allowed them to get to know one another. Despite all that, Richie felt like they were decent friends but he still didn't know much about her.

"That it?"

"Well, you also haven't truly been to a fair until you've been on the ferris wheel at least once!" At that Bev laughed a little and leaned against the railing. "So, how are things going with Eddie?" She gave him a knowing look. Richie shrugged, feeling his face heat up a little bit. It made him feel like a teenager again.

"Eh, I think that he's definitely high strung. It's kinda cute, though. But apart from that, there's nothing. Oh wait, he did hose down a rat with disinfectant." At that, Richie gestured to the plush toy that Eddie currently had under his arm. Bev raised her eyebrow in surprise.

"That's kind of a big deal, I hope you know."

"What, that he's holding a drowned rat? Oh yeah, show stopping news."

"No, seriously. Eddie hates shit like that."

"No he doesn't! He was practically eye-fucking the stupid thing at the booth!"

"Hey! Fuck you!" Eddie interjected before going back to his conversation with Ben. Beverly and Richie burst into laughter to the point of tears.

"Honestly, Richie," Bev managed to say through the laughter. She tried to sound like a parent chastising their child but failed. Richie only laughed harder. "You can be such an ass."

"I know. It's why you love me." Richie joked, nudging Bev's shoulder. They stood there for a second thinking about what to say next.

"He really -"

"Come on, Bev! It's our turn!" Ben interrupted.

"Crap. Okay, Ben! Sorry, Richie. I'll tell you another time." Bev leaned forward and walked to the front of the line to join Ben. Richie and Eddie walked behind the couple and up to the ferris wheel car. Richie and Eddie slid into the car first and got situated. Suddenly, the door closed.

"Hey, what gives? The four of us are together."

"Uh, sorry. That car can only hold two passengers..." The attendant would not make eye contact with Richie. Richie stared at the guy then recalled the scene from earlier. This was the same attendant that Ben talked to early. Richie glared over at Ben, who was already being led to the other cart that was next to them.

"What gives, Ben!" Richie attempted to shout but realized the music had been turned up and that the speaker communication system had been turned off. The ride started moving. With a jolt, Richie and Eddie were moved up into the air.

"Oh shit oh shit oh shit," Eddie panicked. His breathing came out in shorter gasps until he was hyperventilating. Richie lurched forward, slightly shaking the car as he did, to get to Eddie's side of the cart. Eddie fumbled with the fanny pack at his waist. His fingers shook too much for him to get a good grasp on the zipper pull. Richie assumed there must be something inside the fanny pack that Eddie needed so he opened the fanny pack for Eddie. Eddie immediately shoved his hand into the fanny pack and pulled out a small blue and white 'I' shaped item. Eddie jammed the item into his mouth and squeezed it, breathing in as he did. After a few pumps from the inhaler, Eddie slowed his frantic breathing and sagged against the seat.

Richie breathed a sigh of relief and also sunk into the seat. "Well that was fun."

"Oh yes. Near death experiences are always so exhilarating," Eddie griped. Richie sighed again and his hammering heart settled in his chest. The two of them sat in silence for a few minutes before a song

popped on the speaker that sounded like it didn't fit in with the vibe of the previous music the ferris wheel played.

"Oh, I know this song." Eddie stared up at the speaker. "It's one of Ben's favorite bands. New Kids on the Block, I think."

"Well this song blows. But, that explains what Ben was doing with Will."

"Who's Will?"

"The ride attendant. Ben gave him some money earlier in the day. Now I know why. He was paying him to play his shitty music. Hey Ben, your music blows!" Richie yelled as he turned around to the car behind them. Instead of catching Ben's eyes so he could mouth the insult again, Richie saw that the glass of Ben and Bev's car had fogged up.

"Are they... are they having sex in a ferris wheel?" Richie gasped, slightly taken aback. Eddie whipped around and looked at the cart as well. Eddie scrunched up his face in disgust and turned back around.

"They're going to get some type of std in that car," Eddie mumbled, still coming down from his asthma attack.

"So... are you going to be okay?"

After a long pause, Eddie looked over at Richie. "From the asthma attack? Yeah. I deal with that all the time."

"Did my presence leave you breathless?" Richie attempted to joke. Eddie cracked a smile that vanished before Richie could comment on it. "But really, are you going to be okay? Bev told me a little about your, uh, situation."

More silence loomed in the car.

"I'm not sure."

"Do you... want to talk about it?"

"There's not much to say. My ex was a real piece of work. We were

both from a small town. Actually, Bev and Ben were from the town too. Ben and Bev moved because they got great job opportunities. Anyway, when you're from a small town it's hard to find someone else who's gay. I felt like this was the only guy that I ever going to get. It was one of those situations where I didn't realize how horrible the relationship was until I told Bev about some things that happened. So, after one particularly bad night, I left. Packed up all my shit and moved in with Bev. After about a week I managed to get a job and an apartment within walking distance. I've been living there for about three months now."

Richie gazed across to the other side of the car as Eddie gave him a brief background of his circumstance. There was a lot to unpack from everything that Eddie told him. At the same time Richie felt a sense of gratitude that Eddie shared this information with him and a sense of fear. Sharing such personal information with someone you barely knew was overwhelming. *Well, at least he's gay. Means I definitely have a chance. Dammit, Richie. You should not be thinking about that right now.* Richie failed at handling serious and emotional situations well. He knew that if he spoke up he'd make an ass of himself. Instead, he settled on silence as a response.

"So, yeah. Sorry if I seem a little over the top. That guy did a number on me, to say the least," Eddie chuckled. He placed his inhaler back in his fanny pack and zipped the pack closed.

"Uh... thanks for that, Eds." Richie finally replied. The ferris wheel car stopped and the door popped open a few seconds later. Eddie and Richie filed out of the car.

"Don't call me Eds!"

"Well what about Eddy Spaghetti. Has a nice ring, right?"

"Stop with the nicknames. Just call me Eddie."

"Oh come, Eduardo."

"Eddie."

"Eddiekins?"

"Eddie."

"Eddie-bear?" Eddie made an audible gagging noise.

"My mother used to call me that."

"Eddie-bear it is then! Oh hey, Ben and Bev's car door opened." They glanced over to the car next to them, the one with Ben and Beverly, and waited patiently for them to exit. After a moment or two, Ben and Bev hopped out of the car.

"Hey, guys! Thanks for waiting!" Ben waved and dragged Beverly behind him by their connected hands.

"Of course! You know if you wanted a room, we could've easily gotten one for you!" Richie joked and playfully slapped Ben on the back. Ben's face turned red.

"Grow up Richie. We just kissed," Bev punched Richie square in the arm.

"If you say so. But if there's a baby in nine months, I'll know you lied. Isn't that right, Eddie-bear." Richie turned towards Eddie, who frowned and glared at him.

"Leave him alone, Richie."

"But Eddie-bear doesn't mind, do you?" Richie leaned on Eddie's shoulder and pinched his cheek. Eddie reached up and swatted his hand.

"Getting really comfortable for someone I don't know," Eddie replied.

"Oh, Eddie-bear! I'm wounded." Richie laughed and placed a hand over his chest as if he had been shot.

"Come on you two, you can flirt at dinner."

"Actually, Bev, we need to go. It's 9:15 and I got a notification that my Swip was delivered about an hour ago. I don't want it to get stolen." Richie scrunched up his face and looked between Beverly and Eddie. The two of them shrugged. Ben pulled out his phone to double

check on his delivery.

"Ben, we told Eddie we'd take him home. He lives right by the restaurant we were going to go to," Beverly explained, looking to Richie who was a little out of the loop.

"It's fine, Bev. I'll just call a taxi."

"No, it's not. Ben will just have to suck it up, right Ben?" Beverly looked at Ben, who had the largest puppy dog eyes Richie had ever seen a grown adult make. Richie admitted to himself that if Ben were his significant other, he would've caved in seconds.

"Benjamin Hanscom, if you don't knock that off right now -"

"It's okay, Bev. I'll take Eddie home," Richie offered. "I actually pass the restaurant on my way to my apartment." Ben tried to hide his smile while Bev sighed.

"Are you okay with that Eddie?" Bev looked over to their friend. Eddie looked between Bev and Richie and decided that it wouldn't kill him.

"Only if he stops calling me Eddie-bear." Beverly chuckled at her friends.

"Okay, we're back to Eds!" Richie shouted, heading towards the exit gates. Eddie loudly puffed his disapproval but didn't respond. He knew that if he spoke up, the banter would continue and out of all the nicknames that Richie seemed to come up with, Eds was the one he could handle the easiest.

"Thanks for that Richie."

"Yes, thanks Richie!" Ben joined in, pulling up the video feed from outside his house to make sure his Swip was still there.

"Well, I'll see you guys later. Drive carefully," Beverly said. She hugged Richie. When she hugged Eddie, she whispered something softly in his ear. Richie strained his hearing to pick up what she said but failed at understanding the words. After Beverly hugged Eddie, she walked with Ben to their car.

Richie turned to Eddie. "What'd she say?"

"Don't take candy from strangers. Now let's go," Eddie stuttered out.

"Um, what?"

"Don't worry about it."

Richie shrugged and led the way to his car. The walk to the car was silent as neither men said anything to the other. Richie pulled out his key fob and unlocked a small red car. It looked like it was more for show than functionality but Richie couldn't care less. He loved his sports car. He was lucky to have bought it at a reduced price, thanks to all the fixing up he had to do to make it drivable.

"This is a deathtrap. It probably has no functioning airbags. It's not designed to -"

"Eddie. Stop. This is my baby. Don't badmouth my baby. Now get in." Richie slid into his car and started it hesitated before the door opened for him. Richie was stretched out across the front seats with his hand on the inside handle.

"Come on, it won't bite." Richie wiggled his eyebrows as Eddie, who rolled his eyes in response. Richie sat up and Eddie gingerly climbed into the car. He made sure to put on his seat belt before he closed the door. Once inside the car, Eddie was pleasantly surprised at how clean the interior was. There was virtually no dust on the dashboard and no food crumbs visible on the floors. Eddie settled down.

"So, Eds, where to? I need your address."

"I'll just direct you. It's not too far away, actually."

Richie jabbed the power button for the radio. He pressed the seek button a few times until he found a station that was playing a song he actually enjoyed. Instead of the awkward silence the two shared on the ferris wheel car, the silence in the car was nice. Songs changed from one to another with Eddie occasionally interrupting the music to tell Richie where to turn.

Finally, Richie pulled to a stop on the side of the street outside of

some apartments. They looked nice, though the part of town wasn't that great. Richie had a bad feeling but didn't dwell on it. *I'm being ridiculous. Don't let your prejudice pop up now.* He turned off and unlocked the car. Eddie sat in the passenger seat for a little while longer, mainly rummaging through his fanny pack to make sure everything was still there.

"Hey, uh, Richie. Thanks for the ride. I don't know if this is actually on your route or out of the way. But either way, thanks. And uh, thanks for the stuffed animal too." Eddie lifted up the rat. At some point during the night, Richie determined the rat wasn't that ugly after all. Richie waved his hand in response to Eddie's comment.

"It's nothing, really. I just didn't want you to witness what other gross things Ben and Bev might do to one another in their own car."

"Gee, thanks. Not the imagery I wanted."

"You're welcome." Eddie waited a few more minutes. He stared at Richie as if he wanted to say something more. He opened his mouth, then closed it, then opened it again.

"Have a good night."

"You too," Richie replied. Eddie opened the car door and headed towards the apartment complex door, key at the ready. As soon as Eddie entered the building, Richie turned his car back on and headed home. About halfway home, he looked over to where Eddie had been sitting minutes before. He saw something sitting on the seat. At first, Richie thought it was something his, but his car was the one place he kept clean. He reached his hand across the seat while still looking at the street and groped around to pick up the item. Once he felt it, he grabbed it and brought it back to his face. It was Eddie's inhaler. *Shit, I need to go back.* Then it hit Richie. He didn't know where "back" was. Eddie had refused to give him his address, instead settling on telling him the streets to turn on. Richie simply paid attention to where he was supposed to turn rather than the street name. He decided he would send Beverly a text and hope that somehow Eddie wouldn't need it tonight.

After Richie sent Bev the text about the inhaler he pulled into the

parking lot for his apartment building. Something bothered him about the entire night. Maybe it was the fact that he felt like he was feeling something more for this guy he barely knew, or maybe it was the similar relationship issues he experienced that were discussed. Whatever it was, it set him off. Richie entered his apartment and poured himself a drink. *Just one, to take the edge off. To forget about this stupidly cute guy that's damaged and most likely does NOT want a relationship and is clearly not into you. He clearly sees you as just a friend.* Richie poured himself a second drink before he realized he even drank the first one. Richie was glad he didn't have work tomorrow.

3. Chapter 3

Chapter 3

Richie stared at the inhaler in his hand while he swirled his drink in the other hand. The inhaler was a slight blur and Richie could just barely make out what it really was. *I need to get this back to him*, Richie drunkenly thought, sipping more of his drink. A loud buzz distracted Richie and drew his attention to the coffee table. A pale light shone from his phone screen, letting Richie know that source of the noise. He reached forward but realized he still had a glass in his hand. Rather than wanting to place the cup down with liquid still in it, he swallowed the rest in one large gulp. Small hiccups burst out of his chest in an instant. He placed the glass on the coffee table and picked up his phone. A text from Bev greeted him as he unlocked the phone.

Hope you two got home safe, the message read. Richie blinked a couple times to bring the message into focus.

We got hkme dafr, Richie attempted to reply, his fingers pressing the wrong buttons. He was too drunk to care and was sure that Bev knew what he meant.

Very safe, I can tell, Bev joked.

I nerd eddies addteess.

His what, now?

Addtees. Shit. Address. Richie took extra time to write the message so that Bev would understand.

Is everything okay? You're not going to drive now, are you?

Inhawkr. I hsve Eddies.

Figures you can only spell his name out. Richie swore he heard Bev's laugh through the message. He furrowed his brows and aimed as much of his focus on texting as he could.

I have Eddie's inhaler.

Oh shit. Yeah, I'll send you his address. You're not going to drive over tonight, are you?

No. I'm going to mail it.

Smart. I'm pulling up the address and will send it to you in a second, okay?

Richie nodded at his phone as if thought Bev could actually see him.

919 N Virginia Ave.

Thanks, Bev. Richie clicked on the address which opened in his phone's map app. He stared at the location and pulled up the directions. His home was automatically set as the starting point. Richie was surprised to see that Eddie wasn't too far from him, about 15 minutes by car. *I could walk that*, Richie thought, not thinking straight. He attempted to stand up but fell back onto the couch in an instant. He tossed his head back over the edge of the couch, aware he wasn't going to be moving any time soon. Richie stared at the textured ceiling, making shapes out of the brush pattern. *They look like flowers*, Richie thought. He suddenly jerked forward.

"Flowers," he shouted to no one. "Bitches love flowers."

Richie lurched forward and grabbed at his phone again. He opened up his browser for flower shops that deliver. Richie browsed through the bouquets, too drunk to care about the prices that practically jumped at him. Instead, Richie obsessed over the colors the flowers came in. Red flowers seemed to ostentatious and indicated love. It wasn't a message he wanted to send. White flowers seemed nice but upon further inspection indicated purity and innocence, something Richie knew was the furthest from what either of them used to define themselves. *However*, Richie thought, *I do ooze charm*. He laughed out loud at his own joke, though he partially meant it. *I should go with a color in between red and white... Hm... PINK!*

Even though the thought was in head, he winced at the volume. Richie quickly typed "pink flowers meaning" into the search engine

on his phone and anxiously awaited the results. He stared at the loading bar for a good minute before he switched back to the flowers. He thumbed through the page and found a bouquet of pink roses. Something about the flowers stood out to Richie and he decided he had to get these. Richie switched back to the flower meaning tab briefly to see that the meaning was appreciation and admiration.

"That works," he muttered out loud. He felt the last bit of energy seep out of him as the alcohol settled into his system, making him warm and drowsy. He leaned his head on the back of the couch and stared once more at the ceiling.

"Flowers," he whispered as his vision darkened and his eyelids closed.

The alarm blared and echoed off the walls of the apartment. Richie groaned. He pushed himself up from the position he managed to work himself into, face down with his lower body sideways and against the armrest, to look for the sound of the beeping. He attempted to rub his eyes only to be stopped by the glasses still on his face. He audibly whined and removed the glasses. Richie leaned forward to place them on the table only to find the source of the noise. He picked up the phone and prepared to slide his finger across the screen to shut off the alarm only to realize the noise wasn't the alarm but a phone call. A number he didn't recognize. Richie stared at the screen until the green phone icon stopped moving. He breathed a sigh of relief at the silence. A notification popped up on his screen that indicated the missed call. He clicked on the notification to see that this was the third missed call from the unknown number. Richie furrowed his brows and racked his brain as to who the number belonged to. While he mentally ran down the list of people might have had his number the noise from earlier picked back up. Once more, Richie stared at the phone. He winced at the ringing before he settled on answering it. He swiped his finger up on the screen.

"Hola, señor," Richie spoke as he altered his to a scratch and nasally pitch.

"Richie?" Despite the fact that he didn't know the person long, Richie knew exactly who the voice belonged to.

"Hey, Eddie. Um, how'd you get my number?" *Smooth, Richie. Make it*

seem like an issue, why don't you? Richie smacked his forehead.

"Um... Bev, who else?"

"Yeah, that makes sense." Richie could feel the awkwardness.

"Anyways," Eddie began, "I wanted to call and say thanks for driving me home last night."

"No thanks necessary. Now I can stalk you any time of the day," Richie joked. Eddie let out a small, dry laugh.

"Oh, and thanks for the flowers."

"... The what?"

"The flowers? I got them this morning. Though I don't know why you wrote 'botches lavoe fleawrs.' I think it's supposed to say Bitches Love Flowers though, again, I'm not sure why." Richie felt as his eyes widened and his face flush.

"Give me -" Richie tossed the phone onto the other side of the couch and leaned over the edge. He heaved into the trash can he learned to place by his drunken resting place. He felt the bile burn his throat as he stared down at the contents of his stomach, which was pure liquids. He sucked the bile out of his mouth and spit into the trash can before he sat back up. Richie grabbed the phone from where it landed and placed it back by his ear.

"Are you okay?" Richie could hear the concern in Eddie's voice and felt like vomiting some more.

"Just peachy," Richie managed to reply.

"Well, thanks again. I think we should hang out again, some time. Preferably a place that doesn't have a large bacteria breeding ground."

"Ah, there he is." Richie chuckled.

"Excuse me?"

"We went almost an entire five minutes without the mention of sanitation and I was getting worried they laced the flowers with something."

"You're an asshole, you know that?" Eddie deadpanned. Richie laughed, feeling more like himself.

"I can't hear you over the sound of my own deafening awesomeness," Richie responded. Eddie chuckled slightly in response.

"It's gonna sound like I'm hanging up but..." Richie could hear Eddie chuckling on the other end. Richie felt a warmth settled over him as he realized the comfort of the banter they shared. "But seriously," Eddie picked back up, "I would like to hang out again."

Richie felt his throat seize up. He wanted desperately to shout yes. Richie sucked in a deep breath and prepared himself to reply.

"I would -"

"Can you hold on a second," Eddie's voice dropped from his playful tone. Richie heard the click of Eddie pressing the buttons on his phone and an audible gasp.

"Hey, are you okay?" Richie shouted into the phone, hoping that Eddie would be able to hear him since his phone wasn't near his face. He heard the shuffle of Eddie on the other side of the line and heard more buttons.

"Hey, Richie, I'm going to have to go." Before Richie responded the phone clicked off. Richie noticed that it sounded like Eddie was on the verge of tears. Richie stared at the phone in his hand. He sighed.

I hope everything's okay. Richie tossed the phone back onto the couch, once more aware of his pounding headache. He winced but convinced himself to get up off the couch instead of going back to sleep. Something in Richie's mind told him he should stay awake just in case. He wobbled to the kitchen and rummaged through the cabinets, being careful not to bang the doors when he shut them. Despite his pounding headache, Richie was focused on Eddie and what could be going on with him. While he hadn't known him long,

he could tell he wasn't exactly a cry baby. Whiney, sure, but not a cryer. And the way he sounded on the phone was not his usual whining tone. It bothered him, perhaps more than it should. Richie turned on the tap and placed the glass he grabbed off the counter under the water. He tilted his head back, dropped the meds into the back of his throat and quickly downed a gulp of water.

Richie groaned and left the kitchen so that he could sit by his phone in his front room. He flipped on the TV and settled on something that didn't require thought to follow along but didn't put him to sleep at the same time. Every commercial break Richie would glance over at his phone, hoping to see it light up with a message or call from Eddie. Each time, Richie felt his disappointment grow. *He's probably busy with work. Or the issue that caused him to get off his phone to begin with.* He glanced at the clock. 6 o'clock. Richie gaped in surprise at how long he sat on the couch waiting for a response from Eddie, let alone anyone. Richie couldn't recall a time he felt this enamored with an individual. *Let it go,* he told himself, suddenly aware of how pathetic he felt having sat on the couch the entire day. *He's not going to get back to you. You're just going to have to keep guessing as to what happened.*

Richie flipped off the TV, thankful that it managed to do its job of keeping him awake long enough. He figured if he continued sitting by the phone, he wasn't going to get any response. That's usually how these things worked. Richie passed one more glance towards the phone before preparing himself to stand up. As if on cue, the phone rang.

Richie just about jumped across the couch to pick up his phone. He answered without looking at how called, anticipating it was Eddie.

"Hey, Richie." The voice surprised Richie. He pulled back and looked at the caller ID.

"Oh, hey Bev." Richie couldn't hide the disappointment in his voice, much to his dismay.

"I have a huge fucking favor to ask of you."

"Straight to the point as usual."

"I would love to joke but this isn't the time." Richie quickly dropped the tone he developed.

"Yeah, Bev. What is it?"

"I wouldn't ask if it wasn't serious."

"I know Bev. Can we get to the point? You're making me worry."

Bev let out a dry chuckle before she responded. "Can Eddie move in with you?"

4. Chapter 4

Chapter 4

Richie paced back and forth in front of the door for what must have been a half hour, checking his phone every couple of seconds as he did. The conversation between him and Bev played on repeat.

"I wouldn't ask if this wasn't serious."

"I know, Bev. Can we get to the point? You're making me worry"

"Can Eddie move in with you?"

Silence. Richie felt his throat seize up and the words stop just below the block. What the hell was he supposed to say? One part of his mind screamed *Say yes, say yes* while the other, more rational side sternly repeated *This would be a bad idea and you know it*. In the end, the screaming voice won.

"Richie, you still there?"

"Huh? Oh yeah, sorry. Um..."

"I know it's a lot Richie. And I'll owe you until I die."

"Make it your first born and we have a deal," Richie finally managed to spit out.

"Thank you, Richie!" Bev breathed, hanging up the phone after she did. Richie stared at the phone in his hand. He felt like he'd been doing that a lot lately, having interesting phone calls that kept changing his life and then staring at the phone after the person hung up. He couldn't believe what he just agreed to. As if to reassure him that he just agreed to let the guy he's pinned over for the last couple of months stay with him, his phone buzzed with a text from Bev.

Be there in an hour.

Damn if that wasn't the longest hour Richie's ever lived through.

Someone knocked at the door and Richie yelped in surprise, lost in his own thoughts. He grasped the door knob and jerked the door open to see Eddie standing in the hall to his apartment with about 5 different suitcases.

"How much shit do you own?" Richie gasped. Eddie didn't reply. He grabbed his stuff from the hall and dragged it through the doorway into the room. Richie closed the door behind him and watched as Eddie walked over the couch, sat down, and started to cry. Richie tensed up.

"Uh... Where's Bev?" Richie awkwardly asked, looking everywhere but at the crying man.

"Sh-she had to dr-drop me off out back," Eddie hiccuped. "He wa-was following us." Richie's heart tightened and he took a deep breath in. In all his anxiety and joy at having Eddie move in with him, he quickly forgot about the reason why.

"Shit, man. Was he that bad?" Eddie nodded his head from the couch, the tears finally drying. Richie went to the kitchen and poured both him and Eddie a strong drink to calm their nerves. When he returned back to the front room, Eddie had already fallen asleep, still hiccuping in his sleep. *I guess he's exhausted from the stress of it all.* Richie signed and placed Eddie's drink on the table the downed his own. He moved his glance off of Eddie to the suitcases that clogged his doorway. He tried to push them aside but some felt like he must have hidden a body inside. *He's in my suitcase.* Richie imagined Eddie telling him. The thought both frightened and entertained him. *It would give an appropriate example of hiding skeletons in the closet.* Richie laughed at his own joke then went back to moving the suitcases.

One of the medium sized suitcases rattled and Richie couldn't contain his curiosity. He unzipped the suitcase as quietly as he could, only to jump back when pill bottles spilled onto the carpet. Richie jerked his eyes to Eddie on the couch. *Still asleep, thank God.* Richie grabbed the bottles and stuffed them back into the bag. *This guy really is a hypochondriac,* Richie realized when his hand entered the bag and he felt more bottles inside. He removed his hand, careful to not let more bottles fall out, and slowly zipped it up.

After Richie cleared the doorway of the suitcases, he went to his tiny linen closet and removed a spare blanket. *I guess we'll deal with the next steps in the morning*, Richie thought as he spread out the blanket on Eddie, who had nestled into the crevice the couch between the back and the armrest. He stared at Eddie for a few more seconds, all snuggled up on the couch, then decided he should get some actual sleep if he was going to handle tomorrow morning with a clear head. Richie walked to his room and crawled into his bed. He didn't even bother changing his clothes as he slipped under the blanket. He rolled over and placed his glasses on his nightstand and stared up at the blur that was his ceiling. *What did I agree to?* He thought before he drifted off to sleep.

The screaming woke him up. He bolted up in his bed, everything still a blur, and everything was silent for a few seconds. Then the screaming picked back up and he threw off the covers and jumped out of bed. He started to leave his room but realized he couldn't see anything, so he doubled back and grabbed his glasses off the nightstand. He practically ran down the hall as the screaming stopped once more. Richie couldn't think of where the noise could be coming from as he made his way into the front room. He scanned the room and saw a blob on the couch. His first thought was an intruder before he remembered the previous night. *Eddie*. As if on cue, the screaming, more muted now, started again. The noise, Richie realized, was coming from the blob on his couch, Eddie.

Richie walked over to his couch and got closer to Eddie, who was moaning and crying in his sleep. Richie turned on one of the lamps next to the couch so he could see better. Sweat was visible on Eddie's forehead as he jerked his head back and forth with each scream. Richie decided he couldn't keep doing this so he nudged Eddie. Eddie startled awake and flung himself into a sitting position.

"Easy there, don't want to give yourself whiplash," Richie commented, steadying Eddie as he placed a hand on his shoulder. Eddie stared back with puffy, bloodshot eyes. They were glazed over, a sign he was still partially asleep. Eddie blinked a couple of times and scanned the room. He rubbed his eyes then stared directly at Richie.

"Where the fuck am I?" Eddie asked, genuinely confused. Richie laughed despite himself. The look Eddie had on his face was too

adorable not to laugh at.

"You're in my apartment..." Eddie stared for a few more seconds before a look of recognition crossed his face. He frantically looked around.

"What time is it? I need to take my pills." Eddie looked at the watch on his wrist and his eyes widened in response. He leapt off the couch. Richie furrowed his brows at the man in front of him, who had jumped off the couch and practically ran to the suitcases stacked by the door. He unzipped the suitcase that Richie had gone through the previous night and pulled out 6 different bottles. Eddie tucked them under his arm and then looked around the room until he realized he was right next to the kitchen. He walked into the small space, placed the bottles on the counter, and started opening the cabinets one by one until he found what he was looking for.

"Gee, so glad you're comfortable," Richie deadpanned. He couldn't believe the frenzied person rummaging through his kitchen was the same one who cried and screamed during the night. He was hyper fixated on the task at hand, like he flipped a switch in a matter of seconds.

"Do you ever clean your dishes?" Eddie chastised as he cleaned the glass he pulled out of the cabinet.

"Do you ever live a little?"

"The dust has bacteria that could get you sick."

"Right now the only thing making me nauseated is how fast you're talking and going through my things."

"Well I need to take water with my medicine or I could choke."

"Or just swallow the pill with your spit. It's the same thing."

"Spit makes your throat dry."

"I'm pretty sure that is the exact opposite reason spit is generated."

"What you would know? Most of your spit ends up on your glass cups

than in your mouth, judging by the stains."

"I drink to help the spit keep my throat moist." Richie laughed as Eddie visibly shuddered.

"Don't ever say that fucking word again."

"What word? Moist? What's wrong with the word moist? It's natural. Moist. Moisture." Richie punctuated the 't's as loudly as he could and smirked when Eddie flinched each time.

"You're such an ass," Eddie replied. He filled the now clean glass up with water and placed it on the counter so he could open his pills to take them.

"Why don't you get a pill organizer? It's much easier." Eddie looked over his shoulder at Richie.

"And have them fall out of those flimsy containers and into my suitcase bag? No thank you."

What the fuck have I agreed to? Richie asked himself, shaking his head as he did. He stood up and walked into the kitchen.

"So. We need to figure out how things are going to work," Richie started. Eddie looked up from the glass he placed in the sink and nodded.

"Yeah, I guess we do."

"How about we get dressed and head over to get some coffee? We can figure out what to do from there."

"Sounds like a plan. Uh, can you drive me?"

"Oh, uh, yeah. Do you need me to get your car first?"

"I don't have a car." Eddie looked to the side away from Richie.

"Oh." Richie glanced from Eddie to the dishes in the sink and back to Eddie, recalling their conversation about Eddie walking to work. *I guess that makes sense. He never really needed one.* "Well, we'll figure

out how to deal with that situation too, I guess." Richie scratched the back of his head and attempted a smile.

"So... do you want to shower first?"

"Oh, I wasn't planning on showering but I figured you might want to." Eddie nodded, the awkwardness settling between the two of them once more. They both stood in the kitchen, neither looking at one another, in pure silence. "So, uh... are you going to shower?"

Eddie looked at Richie like he sprouted another head before stammering out a brief "Yeah." He walked around the kitchen counter and headed to his suitcases. He rummaged through the bags and pulled out a change of clothes then grabbed one of the smaller bags.

"Toiletries," Eddie offered to Richie. Richie shrugged and watched and Eddie awkwardly made his way to the bathroom and shut the door behind him. As the water sputtered on, Richie caught himself wondering how Eddie looked behind that closed door. Richie's eyes widened and he shook his head to dispel the thought. *Dude, calm the fuck down. He just got here and he's been through a lot,* Richie tried to reason with himself, though the imaginative part of his mind refused to let the picture disappear.

Richie turned towards the sink to clean the glass that Eddie used. He saw the small water stains Eddie pointed out earlier and chuckled to himself. *Guess my dishes are kind of dirty.* Richie looked around the rest of the kitchen and saw bits and pieces of dust and debris scattered here and there. *Maybe I should clean better,* Richie thought before once more laughing out loud, knowing full well he wasn't going to clean to a higher level than he currently did.

He continued to look around the kitchen before walking over to the pile of suitcases still stacked by his door. *Where the hell are we going to put these?* He eyed the suitcases suspiciously and surveyed the remainder of his small apartment. *There's virtually no fucking room for me, let alone another person.* Richie walked over to the couch and plopped down. He leaned his head back against the couch and sighed. He knew he was already too deep into the agreement between him and Bev to back out. Plus, it was Eddie. The oddly cute and awkward man that for whatever reason Richie was overly obsessed

with. Richie once more had the thought *What have I gotten myself into. I should get that phrase tattooed on my fucking body.*

It wasn't long after Richie sat on the couch that Eddie came out of the bathroom. He walked down the hall to the front room and placed his dirty clothes on the suitcase instead of inside. Richie looked over and felt his mouth go dry. Eddie was wearing a tight maroon sweater and khaki pants that hugged his body in ways that the neat freak must not have known.

"Let's go get coffee," Eddie said, reminding Richie of the plan they made only moments ago. Richie nodded his head in reply and stood up. He glanced down at the clothes he had on, the same ones he wore last night and to bed, then back at Eddie and couldn't help but chuckle. Eddie was clearly more put together than him, despite the chaos of the previous night.

"Yeah. Let me grab my keys and then we can go. I have the perfect place."

As Richie pulled into a spot he noticed Eddie looking around curiously.

"I know where we are," he stated.

"Yeah?" Richie stared, waiting for him to explain further.

"Yeah. We're not too far from my work!" Eddie seemed genuinely excited. Richie smiled.

"Well that's good to know. This is my favorite coffee place and it's on the way to the ice rink." Richie explained. Eddie nodded, remembering the rink that Beverly took him to. They got out of the car and Richie opened the door to the cafe for Eddie.

"Ladies first."

"How original," Eddie puffed and rolled his eyes.

"Never claimed to be," Richie retorted and chuckled slightly. He led the way to a small two person table by the back that faced the side street. "Wait here and I'll get us something to drink."

"You don't even know what I like."

"I'm going to assume black coffee. No added sugar or milk for your most likely imagined lactose intolerance." Eddie glared at Richie but didn't reply. Richie laughed knowing he was right and had already figured out Eddie. He walked up to the cash register and smiled when he was greeted by a familiar face.

"Why, if it isn't my favorite barista, Stan the Man."

"Don't call me that, Richie."

"You know you love it."

"I'd love to see you get your coffee and leave."

"No can do today, Stan. I have an important meeting." Richie gestured over his shoulder to Eddie, who had settled into the seat facing away from them. Stan rolled his eyes and started punching buttons on the screen.

"The usual, then?"

"Add a black coffee to that order," Richie began. Stan raised an eyebrow. "Not for me, but for him."

"Ah." Stan nodded, unenthused. He punched more buttons. "Total's \$7.35." Richie handed over the change and tipped an invisible hat at Stanley. Stanley simply stared at Richie and shook his head, used to Richie's antics. Richie turned around and headed back to the table. He pulled out the chair and plopped himself in the seat across from Eddie.

"So, where do we want to start?" Richie leaned back in the seat and stretched his legs onto the seat next to Eddie.

"I guess, where do I put my stuff?"

"You mean the small convenience store you brought with you?" Richie joked. Eddie stared at Richie and sighed, clearly defeated.

"Yes, that. Where am I going to put it all?"

"Well you're in luck because I have a hall closet I don't use. It should have the linens in it but I don't need all that extra room with just me. Or you could store it in my bedroom closet. I don't use that one either."

"What, do you only have three outfits? That would make a lot of sense actually."

"Just because you like to play dress-up doesn't mean you get to trash my wardrobe."

"You literally just did that to me."

"I would never do such a thing."

"Richie."

"Fine, fine. But where would you like to put it?" Richie raised an eyebrow at Eddie and waited for response Eddie muttered something under his breath but before Richie could ask him to repeat it, their coffee was placed on their table. Both men immediately grabbed their drinks and took a long sip.

"I guess I can use the hallway closet," Eddie was the first to break the silence.

"That's what I was going to suggest if you didn't decide. It'll be closer to the couch and you won't have to come into my room if I'm sleeping."

"Why does proximity to the couch matter?"

"Well, that's where you'll be sleeping of course." The look that Eddie gave Richie conveyed disgust and horror.

"I am not sleeping on the couch."

"Where the hell else are you going to sleep? I don't have a spare bedroom nor do I have a spare mattress. You are definitely not using my bed." From across the table Richie rolled his eyes at Eddie's obvious pout.

"You could get a -"

"I'm not getting an air mattress. My couch is a pull-out and has plenty of room and comfort for you to sleep."

"... Where did you get the couch?"

"It was a gift?"

"From who?"

"My grandma. What's it matter?"

"She died on it, didn't she?" Richie couldn't contain the laugh that erupted from his throat.

"Actually no. She didn't," Richie paused. "Grandpa did."

"I knew it!" Eddie practically shouted. "That's absolutely disgusting! You know people release their bowels when they die, right?"

Richie stared blankly at Eddie. He couldn't believe the words coming out of Eddie's mouth. "You're more than welcome to inspect it. I'm sure that suitcase of yours has something to clean it. Rather, I bet you have an entire fucking bedroom hidden in one of those massive things."

"There's no way I'm sleeping on the couch. Let me have the bed."

"What? No! That's my fucking bed." Richie leaned forward and inadvertently slapped his hands onto the table. He saw Stanley glare at him from the counter. Richie meekly waved as an apology, to which Stanley rolled his eyes.

"Well you're the one that's okay with the couch!"

"That doesn't mean I want to sleep on it! I spent good money on my bed and I want to sleep on it!" Eddie and Richie held each other's eyes for a bit before Eddie grumbled under his breath. They both took another sip from their coffee. Their eyes met again and they realized they were at a standstill.

"Well, what are the other things we need to talk about?" Eddie asked as he figured they'd table the discussion of sleeping arrangements for now.

"Well, how about getting you to work? We've already talked about where it is but how are we going to get you there?" Richie and Eddie paused again. "I guess since it's on my way to the ice rink I could take you there in the morning. What time do you normally have to be there?"

"Usually it's around 7."

Richie choked on his coffee. "You're kidding, right? I don't even wake up that early."

"What time does the ice rink open?"

"Noon. It gives me time to sleep in from the comedy shows I do most nights."

"Comedy shows?"

"Uh huh. You're looking at one of the funniest guys in town!"

Eddie's expression revealed the doubt he felt towards Richie's declaration. "Sure. So I guess I could borrow your car?"

"Then how do you suppose I'll get to work?" Richie posed. Eddie shrugged.

"I guess I could take a taxi or something." Richie's brows furrowed. *That would be a lot of money for him to shell out. Plus, it's not too big of a deal for me to wake up earlier to take him to work.*

"Eh," Richie started as he looked around, "I'll take you to work. But you owe me coffee."

Eddie smiled slightly at Richie, a signal he approved of the arrangement.

"This place opens at 6, it's 10 minutes away from my work, and it's close to yours as well. I guess I can agree with that."

"Next order of business: rent and bills." Eddie motioned as if he already planned this part.

"I'll pay half, since that's the most sensible thing to do."

Richie nodded in agreement. "Sounds good. So, I think that's all we really needed to discuss." Richie leaned back once more in his seat and sipped on his coffee, finishing the remainder. Eddie mimicked his motions as he finished his coffee as well. Richie placed his coffee cup on the table and opened his mouth to say something to Eddie but was cut off by a cell phone ringing. Both Richie and Eddie looked at the phone, which was on the table, and leaned forward to see who was calling. Eddie was worried that it might be Bowers but the caller ID notified them that it was Beverly instead Eddie released a sign he wasn't aware he had been holding. He reached out to the phone and he picked it up.

"Hey Bev," Eddie breathed into the phone. "What's up?"

"Just checking in to see how things are going and if you've gotten situated yet. Hopefully Richie's not being too much of a dick."

"I can hear you, you know!" Richie shouted into the receiver, getting another look from Stan. He could hear Bev laughing from the otherside of the phone.

"Aw, poor Richie. Did I hurt your feelings?"

"Yeah, things are going okay," Eddie cut in before Richie yelled into his phone again. He held his hand up to Richie."

"Good, good. Why don't you two come over! Bowers doesn't know where I live, so you should be in the clear."

"Sounds good. We'll see you soon." Eddie ended the call and looked to Richie, who was practically on top of the table. "I'm assuming you heard that?"

"Yeah, and I guess since you agreed I'll be going over too, considering I'm your ride and all." Richie stood up and pushed his chair in. Eddie laughed and followed suit.

"Yeah, I guess so. Have you ever been to Bev's?" Eddie asked Richie as they left the cafe and headed towards the car.

"Nope. Lead the way, mon capitán," Richie exaggerated with a bow and angled his hands towards the car.

Eddie rolled his eyes and opened the passenger door. "Sure thing."

Richie got in the car and started it up. "Off to Benverly's!" Richie shouted, pulling out the parking lot with a squeal of the tires.

"Shoot me," Eddie sighed as he pulled up the directions.